

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Madam Speaker, this weekend, I had a really wonderful opportunity. The Southwestern Company of Nashville, Tennessee, a company that I worked with through my college years and then as soon as I graduated from college, celebrated their 150th anniversary.

What we did was bring together alums of this great company for a reunion. We had a great time. Our focus was on the principles and the skills that Southwestern teaches that have not only made it a great company, but have also added to this country's free enterprise system.

We talked about how this is a company that builds character in young people. It builds the skills that are necessary to become entrepreneurs: tenacity, perseverance, self-reliance, vision, how to be self-reliant in your business, to be small business people, to build an understanding that hard work pays off, and that you should seek risk and the rewards that go with that risk.

This is all an understanding of free enterprise and how free enterprise works.

Madam Speaker, this Nation has the best, the greatest free enterprise system on the face of the planet. That is why we have seen 146,000 jobs created, we have had 25 consecutive months of economic growth, and unemployment is at near historic lows.

Madam Speaker, I commend the Southwestern Company, and I commend the small business people and entrepreneurs of this great Nation who build this free enterprise system.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, the Chair will postpone further proceedings today on motions to suspend the rules on which a recorded vote or the yeas and nays are ordered, or on which the vote is objected to under clause 6 of rule XX.

Record votes on postponed questions will be taken after 6:30 p.m. today.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until approximately 3 p.m. today.

Accordingly (at 2 o'clock and 10 minutes p.m.), the House stood in recess until approximately 3 p.m.

□ 1500

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. BARRETT of South Carolina) at 3 o'clock p.m.

RECOGNIZING 75TH ANNIVERSARY OF ESTABLISHMENT OF VET- ERANS ADMINISTRATION

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the resolution (H. Res. 361) recognizing the 75th anniversary of the establishment of the Veterans Administration on July 21, 1930.

The Clerk read as follows:

H. RES. 361

Whereas in the history of the United States, more than 48,000,000 citizen-soldiers have served the Nation in uniform, of whom more than 1,000,000 gave their lives as a consequence of their duties;

Whereas as of July 21, 2005, there are more than 25,000,000 living veterans;

Whereas the Nation's obligation to its veterans is encapsulated in the following words of President Abraham Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address, delivered on March 4, 1865, "... to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan";

Whereas on July 21, 1930, President Herbert Hoover issued an executive order creating a new agency, the Veterans Administration, to "consolidate and coordinate Government activities affecting war veterans";

Whereas on October 25, 1988, President Ronald Reagan signed into law the Department of Veterans Affairs Act (Public Law 100-527) under which, effective as of March 15, 1989, the Veterans Administration was established as an executive department and redesignated as the Department of Veterans Affairs, with the mission of providing Federal benefits to veterans and their families; and

Whereas in 2005, the 230,000 employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs continue the tradition of their predecessors, caring for the Nation's veterans with dedication and compassion and upholding the high standards required of them as stewards of the public's gratitude to those veterans: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the House of Representatives—

(1) recognizes the 75th anniversary of the establishment of the Veterans' Administration; and

(2) acknowledges the achievements of the employees of the Veterans Administration and the Department of Veterans Affairs and commends them for their contributions to the Nation's veterans.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. BOOZMAN) and the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. BOOZMAN).

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, House Resolution 361 recognizes the 75th anniversary of the establishment of the Veterans Administration, the forerunner of today's Department of Veterans Affairs, that will be observed on Thursday of this week.

Throughout the history of the United States, more than 48 million men and women have served America well and faithfully in military uniform. More than 1 million made the ultimate sacrifice for our freedom, and 25 million veterans are living among us today. These men and women selflessly set aside their civilian lives to put on the uniform and serve us.

The Nation's obligation to its defenders is as old as the Nation itself. Thomas Jefferson noted in 1809 that "the care of human life is the first and only legitimate object of good government." And in his second inaugural address in 1865, President Abraham Lincoln clearly expressed the obligation "to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan."

On July 21, 1930, pursuant to a congressional authorization, President Hoover issued an executive order to "consolidate and coordinate Government activities affecting war veterans," creating the Veterans Administration. The new agency was charged with ensuring that America's veterans received the benefits and services they had earned from their military service.

The Department of Veterans Affairs was subsequently created from the Veterans Administration on March 15, 1989, when President Ronald Reagan signed P.L. 100-527, the Department of Veterans Affairs Act. Today, the 230,000 public servants of the Department of Veterans Affairs continue in the noble tradition of their predecessors to carry out the words of Jefferson and Lincoln by serving veterans and their families.

Mr. Speaker, this resolution would not only recognize the anniversary of the VA as an organization, but it would also acknowledge and commend the achievements and contributions of the men and women who have dedicated themselves to the mission of the VA. In war and in peace, they have always been there for our veterans to provide them the benefits, the care, and the support of a grateful country.

These are the men and women who man the phones at the call centers, work the claims, provide high-quality medical care, and keep the cemeteries looking like national shrines. They are the real VA, and too often we forget to thank them for their dedicated work.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. BOOZMAN) for his remarks, and I rise also in support of this resolution.

Mr. Speaker, 3 days from now the Department of Veterans Affairs, formerly called the Veterans Administration, will mark 7½ decades as a government agency. But the measure before us is not just to acknowledge a mere milestone of existence. On July 21, we will recognize 75 years of a consolidated, organized and formal national effort to carry out what I and many others believe is our most noble mission, to care for those, as Lincoln said, who have borne the battle and for their dependents and survivors. That is why we strongly support H. Res. 361.

More than half of the citizen soldiers who have ever served in uniform in the Nation's lifetime are living today. That is 25 million living veterans to whom we owe the greatest debt, our freedom for their sacrifices. This measure

serves to recognize the significance of this debt while acknowledging the agency that is responsible for administering the benefits and services intended to help repay it.

Many Americans might not realize that the Department of Veterans Affairs, its health care system and other programs, are in fact a national resource for all Americans, veterans and nonveterans alike. It is in fact a national treasure. Nationally, VA's health care system has become what one prestigious medical journal called "a bright star" within the U.S. health care industry.

With more than 1,300 sites of care, VA operates the largest integrated health care system in the country. VA facilities provide a broad spectrum of medical, surgical, and rehabilitative care. It manages the largest medical education and health professions training program in our country. Each year, about 83,000 health professionals are trained in our VA medical centers. More than half of the physicians practicing in the United States had some of their professional education in the VA health care system. In fact, three recipients of the Nobel Prize in medicine were VA doctors.

While providing high-quality health care to the Nation's veterans, VA also conducts an array of research on some of the most difficult challenges facing medical science today. They have become a world leader in such research areas as aging, women's health, AIDS, post-traumatic stress disorder, and other mental health issues.

VA researchers played key roles in developing the cardiac pacemaker, the CT scan, and improvements in artificial limbs. The first liver transplant in the world was performed by a VA surgeon researcher. VA clinical trials established the effectiveness of new treatments for tuberculosis, schizophrenia, and high blood pressure. In fact, my brother, an anesthesiologist, participated in one of the first open heart surgeries in the world at the VA Medical Center in LaJolla, CA.

We know that VA research has improved medical care for veterans and the Nation. It also has a fourth critical mission: it serves as a backup to the Department of Defense during national emergencies and is a Federal support organization during major disasters.

The VA also helps repay the debt to our veterans by administering disability compensation to those disabled by injury or disease incurred or aggravated during their active military service, and pension benefits to veterans with low incomes who are permanently and totally disabled. Spouses, children, and parents of deceased veterans also receive these benefits.

There is one group, however, that does not receive these benefits: those who fought for us during World War II who were Filipinos and drafted into our armed services. They fought a great battle. They had to surrender after the Battle of Bataan and Corregidor, but

they slowed up the Japanese advance for many months and allowed America to prepare. When General MacArthur returned to the Philippines, it was the actions of the Filipino guerillas that had weakened the Japanese forces there and allowed us to regain the Pacific and finally win World War II. We are still struggling to give those veterans, whom we promised benefits when they were drafted in the 1940s, their benefits today. Sixty years later, they have still not achieved equity. We will continue to try to do so.

Since 1944 when the first GI bill began, more than 21 million veterans, servicemembers and family members, have received \$72 billion in GI benefits for education and training. That number includes 7.5 million veterans from World War II, including my father. We bought the first home we could afford to live in in 1950 because of the GI bill that my father was entitled to after his service in World War II. We had the American Dream. For the first time after living with relatives, we had our own home, and we were able to move on with education and achieve what we all call the American Dream.

Not only veterans from World War II, but 2½ million veterans from the Korean War and over 8 million post-Korean and Vietnam era veterans, plus active duty personnel. The VA has also assisted in the education of more than 700,000 dependents of veterans whose deaths or total disabilities were service connected.

The GI bill has helped veterans purchase homes. With a total of \$866 billion for loan guarantees, many people have called the GI bill the most important piece of legislation ever passed due to its impact on the economic, cultural, industrial, educational, and moral framework of our society.

Mr. Speaker, the VA is a strategic, vital national resource in responding to the needs of veterans and also in responding to the needs of the Nation.

Established in 1930 by President Hoover, the Veterans Administration officially became a member of the President's cabinet on March 16, 1989. It was at that precise moment, as our renowned and beloved former chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, Sonny Montgomery from Mississippi remarked, that veterans were allowed to enter the front door of the White House rather than being relegated to standing hat in hand at the back door.

Mr. Speaker, it is right that we honor the institution, its purpose, and its staff members who provide so much care to our veterans on this day.

However, I would have preferred the cash rather than the proclamation. It is regretful that as we commemorate the establishment of the VA, we should be in the midst of a battle to restore adequate funding. Veterans were given the opportunity to approach the front door of the White House. Today, the Office of Management Budget and that same White House have chosen to turn off the lights, draw the curtains, and

pretend no one is ringing the bell. Begrudgingly, in the last 3 weeks after the revelation that VA health care had been severely underfunded, it has sent two requests to Capitol Hill for supplemental funding which still shows that the OBM and this administration cannot or do not want to comprehend the severity of the shortfall that is denying thousands upon thousands the timely health care that they deserve. This is a strain on the VA system, and it must be fixed quickly.

Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman would agree to a unanimous consent request, I would move that we add \$3 billion of supplemental funding right here to his resolution.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair is constrained not to entertain such a unanimous consent request.

Mr. FILNER. Why is that, we cannot help our veterans on this day we are agreeing to a resolution honoring them?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The power to modify the motion rests with the proponent of the motion.

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, once again it is out of order to help the veterans of our Nation.

While this resolution, H. Res. 361, is the right thing to do, a more appropriate action would have been for this body, this Congress and this administration, to provide the resources necessary for the 230,000 dedicated employees of the department to do their jobs right and keep this bright star shining without having to struggle to meet the needs of all veterans who seek to enter VA's doors.

Hopefully, that day will come soon with passage of full funding for veterans programs, budget reforms that prevent a recurrence of the current emergencies, and what we would call "guaranteed funding" for veterans rather than have them depend on a discretionary battle every year in this Congress.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. Speaker, I yield 5 minutes to the gentleman from Florida (Mr. STEARNS).

Mr. STEARNS. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman, and am delighted to be here to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the modern-day Department of Veterans Affairs, and I am here to speak in a positive way on this matter.

I think it has been brought out earlier that it was President Hoover who created the VA by signing executive order 5398. This implemented the legislation. But when we look at this, it did not just begin there. This Nation has always provided the most comprehensive package of benefits and care to our men and women who have served, better, I believe, than any other nation when we look at all of the details.

Reflecting on our Nation's priorities, we have been caring for and compensating our veterans since before we were even the United States. A lot of people do not realize this. Our veterans

benefits began as early as our budding Nation did. In 1636, when the Pilgrims of Plymouth Colony were at war with the Pequot Indians, the Pilgrims simply passed a law that members of the colony would provide support for disabled soldiers. We were helping our disabled veterans even back in 1636.

Then the Continental Congress of 1776 offered pensions for soldiers who would become disabled fighting British Redcoats in the Revolutionary War. Lacking both authority and funding, the Continental Congress left it to the different colonies to make good on the promise, and colonies in place offered grants of public land to supplement the promised pensions.

After the U.S. Constitution was ratified in 1789, the very first Congress assumed the responsibility of paying veterans benefits even way back then. However, we still had no Federal benefits program for veterans. Individual States and communities were doing the job rather than the Federal Government. They provided medical and hospital care to veterans in the Republic's early stages. The Civil War ended in 1865 and resulted in almost 2 million veterans on the rolls. Of course being a Federal program, only veterans who had fought for the Union forces were eligible at that time.

□ 1515

In 1958 Congress pardoned and extended federal benefits to the sole remaining Confederate veteran. That is a little known fact that I think we should be reminded about.

Mr. Speaker, as our Nation fought for freedom and defense in more wars, so grew our obligations of course to meet more needs for our growing veteran population, resulting in institutional care for disabled and indigent veterans of the Civil War, Indian War, Spanish-American War, and Mexican border wars.

Of course, by the 1920s various benefits were administered by three separate government agencies: the Veterans Bureau, the Bureau of Pensions of the Interior Department, and the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers. Therefore, in 1930 Congress authorized the President to "consolidate and coordinate government activities affecting war veterans." And that, of course, brings us to the resolution of today.

But it still does not end in 1930: In 1973 we added a National Cemetery system. And on March 15, 1989, President Bush One, George H.W. Bush, was the individual who elevated the Veterans Administration to Cabinet status. No one before him had thought about it. He was the one who initiated it. And it was renamed, of course, the Department of Veterans Affairs. It is third largest and, of course, the most important of the President's Cabinet departments, in my opinion.

For myself I am honored to serve on the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs throughout my tenure here in

Congress, almost 16½ years. I have had the opportunity to serve our Nation's veterans as Chair of the Health Subcommittee in the 105th and 106th Congress, and, of course, I am proud to be a veteran myself and the son of a World War II veteran who fought in Iwo Jima. But, above all, I am here today to register gratitude for the 48 million citizen-soldiers who have served this Nation in uniform, 1 million of whom have given the ultimate sacrifice of their lives. So I want to show my admiration for the 230,000 employees who work diligently at the Department of Veterans Affairs. In my congressional district and in the surrounding area, I am proud of the VA employees at the Malcom Randall VA Medical Center; the Community Outpatient Clinics in Leesburg, Ocala, and soon, Summerfield; those who assist our veterans with processing disabilities and education and survivor benefits; and four, last but not least, the National Cemetery employees at Bushnell and soon in Jacksonville, Florida. Each and every one embodies the commitment and compassion that President Abraham Lincoln called "him that shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan."

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I appreciate the glowing words of the gentlemen from Florida and from Arkansas. We heard glowing words on Memorial Day; on the July 4 holiday; and I guarantee that we will hear them on Veterans Day, November 11. But as I said earlier, I think the veterans and the employees whom we honor today with this resolution would much prefer the cash; that is, adequate funding for the mission in which they are embarked upon. We simply have not done that.

This Congress over the last 3 or 4 years has vastly increased the amount of money to be given to the Veterans Administration. But the demands have increased at an even faster rate: the aging of our veterans, the new diseases that we find like hepatitis C, the new approaches that we have to such disorders as post-traumatic stress disorder, the increasing number of people affected, and inflation, of course, running at 13 to 14 percent a year. The demands have far outpaced the appropriations, even though we have done better over the past decade.

When OMB Director Joshua Bolten testified just last week at the House Committee on the Budget, he actually said that the VA had more money appropriated than was actually needed. Can you imagine that, Mr. Speaker? With waiting lists for months and months and months for services are common, with vacancies that are not being filled, with maintenance and construction efforts delayed for years and years, with adjudication claims taking several years, he says that we had more money in the VA than was actually needed. Let me quote him directly: "The appropriations have exceeded the

VA medical care needs in the preceding 3 years by over half a billion dollars in each of the preceding 3 years." That is a completely irresponsible statement, and if the head of OMB is saying that, we know why this administration is not adequately funding our VA system. To say that we have half a billion more than we need over the last 3 years in each of those last 3 years is irresponsible and not consonant with the facts that we know. How can we say we have as much money as we need when we turn people away from the VA system? We have people now not being encouraged to register because we have no place for them. In my City of San Diego, the VA Medical Center has almost 1,000 people on the waiting list. People wait for a year for a dental appointment; 3, 4, 5, 6 months for other kinds of appointments. We cannot get the nursing care that we need. We cannot do the construction efforts that are needed and the rehabilitation of our aging hospitals and other clinics. To say that we have more money than we need is completely ridiculous, and I would hope that the administration would apologize to the veterans of this Nation for that statement.

We have been engaged in the Congress on the floor, in the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, on the Committee on Appropriations, on the Committee on the Budget for many weeks trying to find what the chairman of our Committee on Veterans' Affairs calls "the right number." The right number. How do we fund the VA health care system? And we had the Secretary of the VA system testify to our committee just a couple weeks ago that it was because they had a bad mathematical model. They are using an outdated mathematical model. It did not account for the war that was going on. I asked for the gentleman's resignation because of that. We do not know a war is going on; so we have a bad mathematical model. That is the second most irresponsible statement I have heard this week, Mr. Bolten's being the most.

In fact, we know how to define the needs of our veterans. We know how to get a right number. Every year all of the veterans groups in America come together to come up with what is called the Independent Budget, a budget for the Department of Veterans Affairs that is arrived at through a very professional, technical, mathematical way to say here is what we need for our veterans. We have underfunded our veterans' care, not overfunded it, as Mr. Bolten says, every year that I have been in this Congress. We have tried to add over time literally billions of dollars that we have short-changed the VA. This year Democrats have tried at every level, whether it was on the Committee on Appropriations, the authorizing committee which I sit on, the floor of this House, the Committee on the Budget, we have tried to bring up motions to adequately fund this year's and last and next year's budget. Every time we were rebuffed by the majority

party. When I tried to bring up the Independent Budget on the authorizing committee, they said we cannot have a vote on that. When they tried to bring it up on the Committee on Appropriations, they were voted down. When they tried to bring it up in the Senate, it was voted down. When I tried to add 3 billion dollars to the health care budget, as I just did earlier today with a unanimous consent request, I was ruled out of order, and when I challenged the ruling of the Chair, on a straight party-line vote we were defeated. I was ruled out of order because I tried to give adequate funding to our health care budget in the VA, adequate funding to the veterans whom we are praising so profusely in today's resolution.

That is wrong, Mr. Speaker, and now the administration has been found out. The Secretary had to announce that they were first \$1 billion short, now \$1.3 billion. They are still searching for the right number. And yet when the Senate actually voted to put \$1.5 billion additional funds in this year's budget, fiscal year 2005, we could have given the veterans that money immediately and had that resolution signed by the President several weeks ago. But what did the chairman of our committee do? He said no, we only can put in \$975 million. That is the right number. So this House passed one number, the Senate passed another number, and we still do not have adequate funding for the veterans today. Veterans are still being turned away. Vacancies are still not being filled. Waiting lists are still being added to. Maintenance needs are still being inadequately addressed. Nursing stations still go unfilled, while we fight because we do not have a "right" number.

Democrats tried to get in fiscal year 2006 the right number. We were denied. Now it appears that the Senate will add a couple billion dollars to their fiscal 2006 budget, and I hope that we follow.

But we are fighting over numbers that should not have to be fought over. We know what the right number is, and we would not have to fight at all if we passed the bill offered by the gentleman from Illinois' (Mr. EVANS), our ranking member, to institute guaranteed medical funding for the VA. That is, take it out of the discretionary budget, and make it a guaranteed part of our budget so we don't have to fight over the "right" number. There would be guaranteed funding for the health care needs of our veterans.

Mr. Speaker, as we look at the brave young men and women whom we honor so much in Iraq and Afghanistan, the President says support our troops, support our troops, support our troops, and yet when they come home the proper support is not there. I know of veterans who have come home probably with post-traumatic stress disorder, PTSD, lacking the ability to get services or lacking the outreach that is necessary to convince our Marines and

soldiers that they may actually have some mental disorder. We have seen an increase in domestic violence. We have seen an increase in the kinds of societal problems that come from returning veterans with mental disorders, and yet we are not taking the action that we should to meet the needs of these brave young men and women. They may not even get an appointment for months and months and months.

Mr. Speaker, this is wrong. We saw after Vietnam tens of thousands of soldiers returning did not get the proper treatment either physically or mentally. Half of the homeless on the street tonight are Vietnam vets because we did not take care of them the way we should have. We are repeating the same mistake as we look at our brave young men and women returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. They are not getting the care they need. They are not getting the support from our Nation that everybody pays lip service to. We pass resolutions like we do today rather than giving them adequate funding, and we will have the same problems in the coming decade if we do not do it now. This is not the way, Mr. Speaker, to deal with our veterans. Let us pass this resolution today, but let us get adequate funding to the health care budget for both fiscal 2005 and 2006.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I have no further requests for time. I would just again ask all the good gentlemen on the other side, led by the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. BOOZMAN), my friend, let us get this out of the political rhetoric of who has the right number. Let us get these veterans the adequate support they need. Let us pass this resolution but go back to work and provide the cash.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I would like to thank the gentleman from Indiana (Chairman BUYER) for cosponsoring this resolution and the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS), ranking member, for his cosponsorship. I also would like to thank the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER) for his hard work on this also.

Recently I was in Landstuhl, Germany, and we were there on a NATO parliamentary trip, and I had the opportunity to see a young soldier who had been wounded in Iraq only literally the evening before. I was there at about 2 o'clock in the afternoon; this young man had been injured at about 4 o'clock. They cleaned him up, sent him to Landstuhl, gave him extra good care, as we are demanding of these types of situations. But I got to visit with him right after he came out of recovery. And this young man, literally

he wanted to tell his story. His speech was slurred. He was apologizing to us because he could not speak clearly, but he wanted to tell his story. He told us all about what had happened. And then he said two things: He asked about his wife. He had not been married very long, and he lost both his legs. And we assured him that he would be with his family the next day at Walter Reed or Bethesda. The other thing he asked, he looked up and said, I saw this happen to my buddies. I saw it happen to my friends, other guys in the unit, and I never thought it would happen to me.

□ 1530

Then he looked and said, "You know, do you have the ability to help me walk again?"

I could look him in the face and say, "Absolutely. You are going to get the finest care that is provided anywhere in the world, and we will get you walking again."

Well, the reality is that those kind of things do take money, and we are putting lots of money in the system. The commitment is to put whatever money we need in the system.

Another thing that is happening is my favorite uncle passed away a few weeks ago. He was a World War II veteran, a great patriot, and probably in the last 6 months we have spent more on medical care for him than his entire previous life. Again, he was not injured in battle. He was a guy like one of the guys fighting alongside this injured young man.

So our commitment is to support everybody; the guys that are severely injured in this case, but also the rank and file veteran. I think we are doing a good job of that, and I know in a very bipartisan way we are committed to getting whatever funding it takes.

Right now, health care is in such a state that if you look at Medicare, we have got significant problems there in shoring that up. Medicaid, the same situation, as with private insurance. Our employers cannot absorb 15, 20 percent increases in health care costs each year. We have to do something about the underlying inflation costs in health care. I think again as a Congress we are working in a bipartisan way to do that.

Mr. Speaker, again, I look forward to working with the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER) and the rest of the committee in a very bipartisan way to put whatever funding that we need to in the health care system for our veterans, and very much so to get back to the business at hand.

I want to thank our Veterans Administration, all of its employees, all of the workers that volunteer on a daily basis that are so important, thank them for their service, and thank them in this very important recognition.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to unanimously support H.R. 361.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BARRETT of South Carolina). The question is on the motion offered by the

gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. BOOZMAN) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the resolution, H. Res. 361.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and resolution was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H. Res. 361.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Arkansas?

There was no objection.

CALLING FOR FREE AND FAIR PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN THE REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the resolution (H. Res. 326) calling for free and fair parliamentary elections in the Republic of Azerbaijan, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

H. RES. 326

Whereas the Republic of Azerbaijan is scheduled to hold elections for its parliament, the Milli Majlis, in November 2005;

Whereas Azerbaijan has enjoyed a strong relationship with the United States since its independence from the former Soviet Union in 1991;

Whereas international observers monitoring Azerbaijan's October 2003 presidential election found that the pre-election, election day, and post-election environments fell short of international standards;

Whereas the International Election Observation Mission (IEOM) in Baku, Azerbaijan, deployed by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Council of Europe, found that there were numerous instances of violence by both members of the opposition and government forces;

Whereas the international election observers also found inequality and irregularities in campaign and election conditions, including intimidation of opposition supporters, restrictions on political rallies by opposition candidates, and voting fraud;

Whereas Azerbaijan freely accepted a series of commitments on democracy, human rights, and the rule of law when that country joined the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe as a participating State in 1992;

Whereas, following the 2003 presidential election, the Council of Europe adopted Resolution 1358 (2004) demanding that the Government of Azerbaijan immediately implement a series of steps that included the release of political prisoners, investigation of election fraud, and the creation of public service television to allow all political parties to better communicate with the people of Azerbaijan;

Whereas, since the 2003 presidential election, the Government of Azerbaijan has taken a number of positive steps by releasing some political prisoners and working toward

the establishment of public service television;

Whereas a genuinely free and fair election requires that citizens be guaranteed the right and opportunity to exercise their civil and political rights free from intimidation, undue influence, threats of political retribution, or other forms of coercion by national or local authorities or others;

Whereas a genuinely free and fair election requires government and public authorities to ensure that candidates and political parties enjoy equal treatment before the law and that government resources are not employed to the advantage of individual candidates or political parties; and

Whereas the establishment of a transparent, free and fair election process for the 2005 parliamentary elections would be an important step in Azerbaijan's progress toward full integration into the democratic community of nations: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the House of Representatives—

(1) calls upon the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan to hold orderly, peaceful, and free and fair parliamentary elections in November 2005 in order to ensure the long-term growth and stability of the country;

(2) calls upon the Government of Azerbaijan to guarantee the full participation of opposition parties in the upcoming elections, including members of opposition parties arrested in the months leading up to the November 2005 parliamentary elections;

(3) calls upon the opposition parties to fully and peacefully participate in the November 2005 parliamentary elections, and calls upon the Government of Azerbaijan to create the conditions for the participation on equal grounds of all viable candidates;

(4) believes it is critical that the November 2005 parliamentary elections be viewed by the people of Azerbaijan as free and fair, and that all sides refrain from violence during the campaign, on election day, and following the election;

(5) calls upon the Government of Azerbaijan to guarantee election monitors from the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Azeri political parties, candidates' representatives, nongovernmental organizations, and other private institutions and organizations, both foreign and domestic, unimpeded access to all aspects of the election process;

(6) supports recommendations made by the Council of Europe on amendments to the Unified Election Code of Azerbaijan, specifically to ensure equitable representation of opposition and pro-government forces in all election commissions;

(7) urges the international community and domestic nongovernmental organizations to provide a sufficient number of election observers to ensure credible monitoring and reporting of the November 2005 parliamentary elections;

(8) recognizes the need for the establishment of an independent media and assurances by the Government of Azerbaijan that freedom of the press will be guaranteed; and

(9) calls upon the Government of Azerbaijan to guarantee freedom of speech and freedom of assembly.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN) and the gentleman from California (Mr. LANTOS) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN).

GENERAL LEAVE

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H. Res. 326, as amended.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from Florida?

There was no objection.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, House Resolution 326 is a resolution calling on the government of Azerbaijan to ensure that their upcoming parliamentary elections in November are peaceful, free and fair.

In the most recent elections in Azerbaijan, the 2003 presidential elections, international election observers concluded that they fell well short of international standards. The observers found numerous instances of voting fraud, restrictions on political rallies and intimidation against political opponents.

Since that election, Azerbaijan has taken a number of positive steps, such as releasing some political prisoners, opening their airwaves to opposing viewpoints and allowing greater freedom of speech and assembly. However, much more needs to be done before the people of Azerbaijan and the international community can have confidence in the outcome of the November elections.

As stated in H. Res. 326, the government needs to take several steps to ensure fairness in the election process. First, it must permit the full participation of all opposition parties in the upcoming elections.

Second, and perhaps most importantly, the government of Azerbaijan must allow election monitors from the OSCE, Azeri political parties and other political organizations unimpeded access to all aspects of the election process. The government simply cannot pick and choose which organizations will be allowed to verify that the election is free and fair.

Finally, the resolution supports the international efforts to change the election code of Azerbaijan to provide all political forces with equitable representation in the country's election commissions.

Azerbaijan and the United States have enjoyed a strong, bilateral relationship since Azerbaijan gained its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. We look forward to this friendship growing even closer in the coming years. In the long term, however, the strength of the relationship between our two nations, as well as the stability of government in Azerbaijan, will largely depend on Azerbaijan becoming a more free and more democratic nation.

I therefore urge the government of Azerbaijan to hold free and fair elections, and I urge my colleagues to support this resolution.